
Sarah Chaytor 00:05

Welcome to CAPEcast, the podcast from CAPE, the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement project. CAPE is a partnership between the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Northumbria, Nottingham and UCL. We are funded by Research England to explore ways of strengthening the engagement between universities and public policy. And over the course of 2021, CAPE and the Ministry of Justice are collaborating together to understand the evidence gaps and needs in the Ministry's Areas of Research Interest, and how the research community can respond. We look forward to updating listeners on this activity towards the end of the year. Today, though, we're delighted to be joined by the wonderful Amy Summerfield, who is Head of Evidence and Partnerships at the Ministry of Justice's Data and Analytical Services Directorate. Amy has recently been working to develop the Ministry of Justice's Evidence and Partnership Hub, and we've been really enjoying working with her and her team to develop a collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. Amy will be talking with Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett, CAPE's Project Coordinator at UCL and together there'll be taking an inside look into how the Ministry of Justice and the Evidence and Partnerships Hub works with research, researchers, and universities.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 01:17

Great to be here. Hello, I'm Kayleigh and I'm the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement, otherwise known as CAPE, Project Coordinator, based at UCL which is one of the partner universities of CAPE. I'm also the co-chair of the University's Policy Engagement Network of their subcommittee focused on equity, diversity and inclusion.

Amy Summerfield 01:36

Hi there. I'm Amy Summerfield, and I'm currently Head of the Evidence and Partnerships Hub within the Data and Analytical Services Directorate at the Ministry of Justice. I'm a government social researcher by background and I've worked in the Ministry of Justice for around 12 years, having previously worked at the Inspectorate of Prisons, and then for many years in family justice policy.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 01:58

Amazing. So I'm really excited to be discussing everything Ministry of Justice, and how the Ministry engages with research and researchers at universities today. But to begin with, I think it'd be really helpful if we could get a bit of a picture of what the Ministry of Justice is and what it's seeking to do.

Amy Summerfield 02:17

Sure. So the Ministry of Justice is a major government department across Whitehall. So overall, we are here to protect and advance the principles of justice and deliver a world class justice system. We're a big department over 70,000 people work for the Ministry of Justice. This includes colleagues developing policies and public services. But that number also includes those working on the frontline across our justice system. So encompasses courts, prisons, and probation services, and we're supported by over 30 agencies in delivering our remit.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 02:56

That's quite huge, isn't it? Really, I don't know how it compares with other departments but certainly sounds like a huge organisation. So what's the remit of the Ministry of Justice? Is it England focused, for instance, or is it much broader?

Amy Summerfield 03:09

It's England and Wales. And you're right, our policy responsibilities across England, Wales are significant, wide ranging, and they affect some of the most vulnerable people in our society. So people who come into contact with the justice system often have other problems or are vulnerable in other areas of their lives. So we have a big responsibility. And some of these remits covers the decisions and implementation of policies, such as when to build new prisons, how to modernise the court system and maintain access to justice, to understanding which interventions work to reduce reoffending and protect the public, right through to

ensuring children's needs are put first in legal decisions around their care. So the policy remit is wide ranging. We're a ministerial department, which means we advise and report to our Secretary of State for Justice, who's also the Lord Chancellor. So these are dual roles, but they're the same person that are unique to the Ministry of Justice.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 03:21

So where do you Amy then sit within the broad remit of the Ministry of Justice?

Amy Summerfield 04:18

That's a good question. So I work within a central team within the Ministry of Justice, the Data and Analytical Services Directorate. So we are, as I say, a cross cutting central team, we have over 300 professional analysts from across the government analytical profession. So as I mentioned, I'm a government social researcher and I work with other analysts in my day job. I work with economists, statisticians, operational researchers, and data scientists. And collectively the vision of the Data and Analytical Services Directorate is to generate and maximise the use and impact of evidence to underpin decision making in the MOJ and thereby improve the outcomes of our justice system users. So the director works alongside colleagues across MOJ in policy, operations, finance and corporate teams to ensure that the use of data and evidence is at the forefront of policy decision making.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 05:23

So you mentioned at the start that you're the head of evidence at the evidence and partnerships Hub. So would you mind telling us a little bit more about that? How did that come about? What was the context in which it needed to be set up? And what are you hoping to achieve?

Amy Summerfield 05:37

Yes, so I am head of the Evidence and Partnerships Hub, we are a relatively new Hub, with big ambitions. And really the context of the establishment of the Hub is we all hopefully, we

all government included, recognise and appreciate the importance of data and evidence in making these really important policy decisions. And, you know, as I've just mentioned within the Ministry of Justice, that's exactly what the data and analytical Services Directorate sets out to do. And this reflects the commitment across government for transparency and accountability and evidence-based policymaking. So there's, there's significant and ongoing demand for robust up to date evidence for policy, we as a directorate are there to support this. But policymaking is often fast paced, iterative, sometimes short term and reactive in nature. And policy development, therefore doesn't necessarily align with what is required to develop robust and future proofed research and analysis. So this presents us with a challenge, there can be a challenge and a risk of short term responses to policy that are not grounded in the best evidence. So the evidence and partnerships Hub is one way within the Directorate that we're trying to transform the way evidence is used to generate policy insights, to really embed the culture change of using data and evidence differently. And we intend to, we hope to achieve this in broadly two ways. So firstly, to adopt a more strategic, holistic and longer-term approach to developing the evidence base, because we believe this has the potential to make the most difference to policymaking and our users. And secondly, to do this by drawing on the wealth of knowledge and expertise of our academic partners. So essentially, we can only utilise the best evidence and make the best robust and rounded decisions by looking outside of our four walls. Essentially, the aims in our Hub are to adopt a strategic approach to developing the evidence base, maximising the use of external expertise to enhance the use the application and availability of evidence across the department's priorities, to strengthen our strategic research capabilities by collaborating and partnering with academic experts and research networks and funders to address our critical evidence gaps and to reinforce the impact of evidence at all stages of policy and operational development and evaluation.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 08:22

Wow, that's quite a lot of things that the Hub's doing. And it's a really exciting way for instance, for CAPE to partner with the Ministry of Justice given you've set up this Hub to be looking so strategically and collaboratively with the research community. So if we think about

it at a practical level, how does the Hub work and engage with those researchers and the research based at universities?

Amy Summerfield 08:45

Yeah, so there's several ways in which the Hub are already engaging and working alongside academic researchers and universities. Just to take a step back last year, we published the department's Areas of Research Interest (ARI), which sets out our critical evidence needs in the medium term, we developed this via comprehensive assessment of the department's evidence landscape, in consultation with our colleagues across the business and our partner agencies. And this ARI is the basis by which we're engaging with our academic and research networks to help address some of these critical evidence gaps and build a sort of strategic knowledge base that I was referring to. So one of the ways we are engaging is via an academic network. So we've established an academic network, which comprises over 200 researchers and growing from across a broad range of areas disciplines and expertise. These researchers have been agreed to be contacted by the Hub for co-creation and collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. And we've recently refreshed the network to broaden the diversity of its membership including from early career researchers. So we really want to expand the networks by which we are engaging with to develop the evidence base. And the network helps us establish and maintain these constructive links between policy and academia and taking part in the network gives researchers the opportunity to engage in a number of activities facilitated by the Hub. So as an example, it provides you [researchers] with the opportunity of sharing the latest published and emerging evidence with policymakers and providing advice to them about the real world implications of that evidence to inform their decisions around policy and practice, you may be given the opportunity to take part in policy roundtables, or project advisory groups to lead or take part in academic seminars and other events to share and disseminate your research. Also, to find out more about potential avenues for collaboration, including potentially tendering opportunities for co-created research projects, and to seek support from the Ministry of Justice on projects that may relate to the critical gaps that we've outlined in our IRI. So we encourage academic researchers, whether you're freelance or affiliated with a university to join the network, if you believe it would be relevant and useful to you. Another way to engage

with the Ministry of Justice and policymakers is via our seminar series. So we've recently launched a seminar series for academics to share their work with policymakers and government analysts. We want to encourage and facilitate discussions on kind of the actionable insights and real world, as I say implications for policy and practice.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 11:51

So for the seminar series, are you looking specifically for colleagues to answer or speak to some of those Areas of Research or ARI questions you've already identified? Or is it a forum through which new research or evidence that's not currently on your radar to be sort of proposed as a seminar session?

Amy Summerfield 12:10

Both, I think we are open to. So the Areas of Research Interest are our priorities because they are aligned with the department's strategic objectives for the justice system. So those critical gaps are our priority. But we're open to academic expertise. We want to engage with academic research that's not on our radar. Of course, it's about making sure that we have access and understanding of the available evidence base. So by joining the academic network, that's how you get opportunities to discuss with the Evidence and Partnerships Hub what content might be appropriate for a seminar to be held with our policy colleagues. So we intend to facilitate some fellowships and secondments to enable academic researchers to be embedded within the Ministry of Justice's, and it's on policy facing teams to help us explore how we can take new approaches to solving some knotty kind of policy and practice challenges. We think that fellowships and the comments are mutually beneficial for academia and government. So from academia, we get some external expertise and challenge to tackle some of our biggest research priorities. And in exchange, researchers get first hand experience of working in a fast paced, high profile public policy environment. So we're currently part of the ESRC people exchange framework pilots, and hope to embed two fellows within the Directorate to help us progress, particularly our evidence evaluation and experimentation agendas. But going forward, we're keen to build upon and expand on our own secondment models. So watch this space, as we grow.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 14:01

Very exciting, it's really brilliant to see that these initiatives are in full flow already. And that through the development, I think it's the Ministry of Justice's second Areas of Research Interests, which have been published today. And then through the academic network, and the seminar series and upcoming fellowships and secondments as a real breadth of ways to engage, which really looking forward to hearing more about as they develop.

Amy Summerfield 14:26

Just to clarify, you're right, there's a breadth of activities within the Hub that we're hoping to deliver. And we largely seek engagement via the academic network, which is why I started with the academic networks. That's really the way in for us to start communicating and collaborating with each other.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 14:45

Could you tell us a little bit more about what has worked well, so far in terms of engaging with the research community through the evidence and partnership Hub? So have you seen any changes or things that have had an impact since the evidence and partners has been set up?

Amy Summerfield 15:01

Yes, I mean, in terms of what's working well, engagement with the research community has been exceptionally positive. So far, we've received great feedback on our partnership strategy and our ambitions. And academic researchers are very keen to be involved. So help us sort of tackle some of those critical evidence gaps. In terms of specifics, I'd probably focus on a couple of examples that I think is working really well. And of course, one of them has got to be our partnership with CAPE. We're really proud to be one of the major government partners with CAPE. Our partnership is providing us with the opportunity to test and trial and explore what works for effective policy and academic engagement. We held a

successful sandpit event earlier this year where we brought together academics and policymakers to discuss and identify mutual Areas of Research Interest and expertise and aligned with our Areas of Research Interest. And from this, we are developing several exciting collaborative activities in a number of high priority areas. So these include evidence syntheses, fellowships, and research symposiums in areas such as reducing reoffending disproportionality and sentencing, and drivers of court demand. And these activities are really helping us make the case for enhanced collaboration with the academic community.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 16:31

I think just demonstrating the different areas you're working on there is quite insightful, I think, to the different needs and demands and ways of engaging between academia and policy and the fact that there isn't like a set template or particular mould, which works in particular context, or at least what we know of yeah, and I guess that's all part of discovery at the moment through the CAPE project.

Amy Summerfield 16:54

That's exactly right. It's not an exact science and the CAPE partnership is helping us sort of test different ways of understanding what works in sustaining those relationships and having the most impact through those collaborations. I just also wanted to give you a second example of what's working really well. The research and academic engagement programme of the Ministry of Justice's pioneering data linking project Data First, which is funded by ADR UK. Essentially, through this programme, we're sharing de-identified datasets linked across the justice system, and with other departments with accredited researchers. And the project is really enabling us to build and facilitate links between government and research partners. So working in collaboration, we're looking to identify priority areas for analysis to make best use of these datasets and build a sustainable body of knowledge on our users and their pathways and outcomes across the justice system, but also other areas such as health and education. So we're working with academic partners supporting their applications to access the data for research projects, identifying feasible research questions, and facilitating links directly with policy colleagues to maximise the impact of their findings. We've also run a

series of seminars with the research community to promote the use of these datasets and identify what is feasible from the data to answer research questions. And we're running a rolling programme of externally funded research fellowships to address key questions in the Areas of Research Interest.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 18:42

Fantastic. We often talk about the differences between academics and those who work in policy, you mentioned above the requirement for quick or rapid responses to policy needs, which then might undermine or overlook evidence that's out there because of time pressures and because of ease of access to where evidence currently sits. So how has the evidence and partnership have been able to overcome some of those differences or challenges?

Amy Summerfield 19:08

Yeah, I completely agree. There are different ways of working between policy and academia, different priorities and different languages, if you like, but we have so many examples of excellent outcomes when we do work together. And the differences can be positive, you know, they can help both policy and academia think about problems in different ways and give you different perspectives. It helps I think, overcoming some of the differences or challenges if you like if people are open and honest about those challenges that they're facing and being accommodating to different priorities and styles of working so you know, across the board resources are tight, workloads are busy. In the Hub and, via the CAPE partnership we are testing different ways to understand what works for effective and positive academic and policy engagement. And we're lucky because we've been given the headspace to explore this. It's not necessarily easy, and it's not an exact science. But there's a huge appetite on both sides to demonstrate a maximise what the mutual benefits of academic policy collaboration are. And as I say some of the challenges can be worked through an overcome with simple dialogue like this; being honest about the respective challenges that we both face, raising issues and concerns, trying to clarify misconceptions and ultimately agreeing and working towards a common goal, which is to develop the evidence base to make better decisions for our users.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 20:38

That's really refreshing and encouraging to hear, I think, particularly the approach of being open to identifying where there are differences, that differences can be a positive, and that whilst we acknowledged them, we can then find potential solutions or ways through and I think also speaks to the collaborative and sort of co-productive nature in which I guess we're wanting to see academic policy engagement move more towards,. In what formats are you most keen to get input from researchers on when we're thinking of engaging with the Ministry of Justice?

Amy Summerfield 21:11

The priorities are illuminating and developing the key questions outlined in our Areas of Research Interest. As I mentioned, they're aligned with our department's strategic objectives for the system. So they are by their nature, our priorities. They reflect some of the most long standing and complex evidence gaps that we have on our users and their outcomes. But we're also interested in working in collaboration with researchers to explore more cross cutting themes that are common across those substantive areas. So we have sections within the ARI, for example, on access to justice or reducing reoffending. We're also interested in working in collaboration with researchers to explore some of the cross cutting themes that are common across the substantive areas. So the substantive themes might include access to justice or reducing reoffending. But these cross cutting themes provide a lens through which those themes can be viewed. So examples include diversity or place, we're interested in those issues or those lenses across all of our themes. So we hope this cross cutting section will help us unable to take a cross sectional approach when addressing important questions. And further to that, as well as the ARI we'd like to engage with methods based researchers to help enhance our toolkit, if you like as our technical capabilities as government analysts to make sure that we are employing varied and multidisciplinary and innovative techniques in exploring these evidence gaps. We want to push the boundaries in the use of innovative methodologies to address some of our complex evidence gaps. And in terms of formats I think you asked is, there are many formats in which researchers can contribute to this. So I've touched on a few but could be collaborative or co-created research

projects, simple knowledge exchange, such as sharing and disseminating the latest academic research, sometimes via seminars and roundtables through to fellowships and the comments. As I've mentioned, there are a number of ways in which we can start to illuminate and develop some of the gaps that the department has identified.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 23:28

And I guess, as you've now begun engaging, or having engaged with your 200, but growing members of the academic network community for the Ministry of Justice, have you noticed any changes or how has engaging more readily with researchers change what's been done within the Ministry of Justice?

Amy Summerfield 23:47

Yeah, I mean, I should say that within the Data and Analytical Services Directorate, we have always engaged with academic researchers and expertise. So that's not necessarily a new thing. But what is new via the Hub is a more centralised, dedicated function to empower our colleagues to make best use of academic expertise, but also for us to bridge the gap between academia and researchers. So quite simply, engaging with researchers is given us the opportunity to look at things differently. To make sure from a wider perspective, we're not naive enough to think that we can have access to all of the available evidence without looking outside of the department. So engaging with researchers means we can be more confident in the advice we are presenting to our ministers. So the advice we are giving is grounded in a more rounded, robust evidence base from a number of different academic perspectives.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 24:50

On a practical level, how can academics and researchers engage or reach out to your team to the evidence and partnership Hub to the academic network in general, are there any emails or newsletters that they could sign up to so that they could find out more information?

Amy Summerfield 25:07

Yeah, certainly, or the first thing to do is as I say is get in touch and join our academic network. This is the forum to share evidence, make connections, identify learning and collaborative opportunities with the evidence and partnerships help and provide feedback on what we're doing. We want to connect with researchers to help us address gaps in our IRI. So if you are aware of evidence that might be relevant, or submitting a funding proposal from a research organisation that might help generate some of this evidence, then please get in touch with there's also opportunities to identify mutually beneficial projects for collaboration or co creation. So if you join in network, we can keep you updated on these opportunities for working together, we publish a regular newsletter to the network. So the email to get in touch is evidence_partnerships@justice.gov.uk. But you can also find out more information on our Areas of Research Interest page on gov.uk.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 26:12

Exciting, I'm sure many of our listeners will be going over to those web pages or dropping you an email shortly. Before we conclude they at this has been absolutely fascinating hear about all the various projects and ways in which you're engaging with researchers. Is there anything else you'd like our listeners to know or be aware of?

Amy Summerfield 26:29

I guess, just to say that we're really pleased with the progress that we're making. So far, we've got bigger ambitions as we grow. So we're excited to build on those foundations and we want the academic and research community to sort of come along with us for the ride and get in touch.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 26:47

Amazing and we look forward to updating listeners with more information about the CAPE and Ministry of Justice partnership, where we've been trialling, as we've mentioned already,

some of the mechanisms and interventions to support academic policy engagement in a more strategic way. So hope to be able to do that later on this year. Well, thanks very much, Amy. It's been absolutely brilliant talking with you.

Amy Summerfield 27:07

Thank you very much for having me.

Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett 27:10

For now, that's it. Thank you very much for listening to CAPEcast, and see you next time.